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'The Most Dangerous Game' in Mideast

A deadly two-man game has been going on for years in the Middle East—and both players are men who should know better. The participants, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi, have been trying, by one means or another, to remove the other from the playing field "with extreme prejudice"—by assassination or violent overthrow.

This updated version of "The Most Dangerous Game" has been followed with some nervousness by the American intelligence community. U.S. hopes for peace and stability in the region would blow sky-high if either Sadat or Qaddafi succeeded in rubbing out his rival.

The seesaw struggle between the two leaders is chronicled in U.S. intelligence files. The falling-out began nearly a decade ago. Qaddafi, a young pan-Arab zealot, was an admirer of Sadat's revolutionary colleague and predecessor, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the charismatic military man who masterminded the ouster of Egypt's playboy King Farouk in the 1950s. Nasser at one point tried to unite Egypt and Libya as a first step in creating one great Arab nation.

Qaddafi—who even lived for a time in Sadat's home—came to believe that Sadat had betrayed the Nasser dream and the pan-Arab cause. Even before Sadat solidified this suspicion by making peace with Israel, the two

Arab rivals indulged in what State Department analysts described in their reports as "bizarre adventures" aimed at each other's throat.

In actual numbers, Qaddafi has probably planned more violence against Sadat than the other way around. But Sadat has done his share.

In public, Sadat has called his desert neighbor crazy, childish and suffering from a Napoleonic complex. In private, he has planned Qaddafi's assassination.

"President Sadat," says one of several top-secret CIA reports, "has ordered the Egyptian intelligence service to draw up plans to overthrow Libyan President Qaddafi. . . . Sadat reportedly stipulated that the coup should appear to originate within Libya, and that care be taken to conceal Egypt's hand. . . . Sadat is apparently going about the planning with some caution."

One of many Qaddafi plots against Sadat is described in a top-secret State Department report. It tells of a meeting between the Libyan dictator and George Habash, a member of one of the Palestinian terrorist groups Qaddafi has bankrolled to the tune of some \$70 million a year.

Habash was promised all the money he needed to engineer Sadat's overthrow, according to the report. The plot was to involve leftist Egyptian army officers, Palestinians and communists, and was to include "a plan to assassinate the Egyptian leader, using

non-Arab terrorists to avoid damaging the Palestinian position in the Arab world."

One Qaddafi plot against Sadat was discovered by Israeli intelligence and the Egyptian president was tipped off. Sadat angrily ordered a border attack on Libya. Alarmed by this open clash, the United States quietly stepped in.

But the plots keep coming: "every three to six months," including one by Qaddafi to blow up Sadat's plane on his way home from Washington last April. Our intelligence agents learned of the plot and Sadat was routed through England instead.